

Profession as a journey
Dale Carmen O.E.F. 7/2020

Not long ago I had a book on snowflakes. It was a fascinating mix of math, science and spectacular photographs. I gave it to my dentist who skis all over the U.S.

No two snowflakes are identical which seems impossible, yet it is possible, as is the fact that the fingerprints of seven billion people are different. Knowing these things can happen in the natural realm, it is easy to accept that souls are uniquely different in and of themselves in the spiritual realm and in their relationships to God. Like snowflakes, souls are individually shaped by a multitude of external, internal and supernatural forces.

I was asked to participate in making a recommended list of resources for the continued spiritual growth of Professed members of O.E. F. This request unleashed an avalanche in my mind, heart and soul! You see, I came to Franciscan formation completely ignorant of spiritual growth; yet the instinct was too strong to ignore.

As a Postulant and Novice, there were the basics: The Omnibus of Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies. There were also Franciscan writers like Richard Rohr (Simplicity), Murray Bodo, Michael De La Bedoyere, Johannes Jorgensen; and non-Franciscans who wrote about Francis like Zofia Kossak (Blessed are The Meek) and Nikos Kazantzakis. Franciscan sources continue to feed me in Profession.

Early on other faith traditions gave me insight into the 'how' of practicing a Rule. Authors such as Evelyn Underhill, Anthony Bloom's Beginning to Pray and Courage To Pray, Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline, Ann and Barry Ulanov's Primary Speech and Your Word Is Fire by the Hasidic Masters.

I learned ethical and moral dimensions of our Rules and Principles through black authors like Richard Wright, James Weldon Johnson, Eldridge Cleave and, recently, Ta-Nahisi Coates (Between The World And Me); and native books like Black Elk Speaks (John G. Neihardt), and Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee (Dee Brown). Books like those by Canadian Farley Mowat (Never Cry Wolf) led environmental awakening to my Franciscan vocation.

I owe a debt of soul formation to authors and activists such as Dorothy Day (The Catholic Worker), Martin Luther King, Jr., William Sloane Coffin, Dorthée Soelle and many, many others.

In spiritual growth, I think it is crucial to face the reality of evil and mortality. I credit many mentors who have helped me do so; Elie Weisel and Simon Wiesenthal (holocaust), Letters and Papers From Prison by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and It's O.K. To Die by Monica Williams Murphy, M.D., and Kristian Murphy, MKU, LLC. In spiritual growth, I feel I need to face the sins of the church and Christianity in general, as well as hard questions and dark nights. Author Karen Armstrong has helped me and also Silence by Japanese author Shusaku Endo and recently, Brief Answers To the Big Questions by Stephen Hawking.

Lastly, I mention Jeff Foxworthy's Redneck Dictionary because I knew every word and concept and finally claimed my grounding with prairie dirt between my teeth and toes.

Every one of these resources contributed to the making of my Franciscan soul, and these mentioned are just the tip of the iceberg. Remember, an iceberg is just multitudes of individual snowflakes transformed.

Each and every one of us in O.E.F. Community could make a 'Brief List of Recommended Reading for Professed', and no two would be alike. We would share some required readings and there would be similarities; yet our lists would have vast and wonderful diversity. That is the beauty of who we are as a Franciscan Order.

May we feed on whatever helps us be faithful and in communion with each other, the Divine and with our needy world. Peace and Joy, Dale Carmen